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Marriage Relations

Kanuri marriages are virilocal from the point of view of the woman, which means that she always leaves her residence to live in the compound of her husband. From the point of view of the man, marriages are patrilocal or neolocal. Thus a man either brings his wife to the compound of his father or very close to it, or else takes his wife to a new residence away from the residences of both their kin groups. Thirty-eight out of sixty-one informants in Magumeri reported bringing their first wives to the house of their own father or setting up a contiguous compound. For successive wives the number dropped to about one-half of those asked.

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The inception of the first marriage for young girls is decided upon by her family and chiefly among these her luwali or guardian,(1) who is most commonly the head of the household in which the girl is living at the time of her marriage. A luwali can stand in various relational positions to the young girl - he may be her father, her elder brother, her cross-cousin, or patrilateral parallel-cousin, or adoptive parent. When the household head is not the luwali, which can occur for example in the case of cousin wardship, then the luwali still has the rights of marriage dispensation over the girl. Indeed he would take anyone to court who tried to inveigle these rights away from him. Although such cases are known they are quite rare.

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The luwali's choice of potential husband is based on the availability of males seeking virgin wives plus his desire to create profitable relationships for himself. If he is a high status person, his wife-giving rights will be used most commonly to tie political and/or

(1) C.F., "lugali" in Ellision, R.E., Marriage and Childbirth Among the Kanuri, Africa; Vol. 9, 1936, pp. 524-535.

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429 economic subordinates more closely to the exercise of his power and authority. In cases where this is less of a consideration (e.g. in marriages between peasant households) then the sheer economic benefit of the marriage to the luwali becomes the primary determinant in the
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565 decision. Among peasants it is not considered desirable to marry with traditionally regarded low status persons (male or female speaking) such as drummers-entertainers, slaves, butchers, blacksmiths, tanners, petty brokers, or anyone whose birth is considered illegitimate (conceived out
[848] of wedlock). This results in a certain amount of endogamy among these occupation groups excluding illegitimates who are pariahs in the eyes of all.

582 Kanuri marriages are governed by the following rules of incest.. Marriages with parents or their siblings, own full or half siblings are forbidden, and this rule carries over to compounds into which ego's parents have remarried where no real biological relationship with ego's parent's new spouse's children obtains. It is culturally prescribed that ego (a male) may not marry a matrilateral parallel cousin, although several upper class informants felt that this was a custom of the people and not a Muslim ordinance. No marriages of the latter variety were observed during the field research. It is considered wrong (i.e. shameful) to marry wives of consanguinal kin of any generation after they have divorced ego's kin member. No reason was given for this rule, but no exceptions to its practice were observed.

It is considered inappropriate for a man to marry a woman older than himself. But age is known in only a vague general way and most men claim they are married to women younger than themselves.

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589 During his adolescence and increasingly so as he grows older, a young man strikes up liaisons with divorced women who are looking for